



This series is about elementary defense against No-trump contracts, focusing on opening leads and play by the partner of the leader

VB#24 Year 1 Third hand defense in NT (giving count) Part 1 SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 29/10/2014	By: East
Dealer: North	Board #: 1
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: None

North  
 ♠ K92  
 ♥ T84  
 ♦ QT842  
 ♣ Q9

West  
 ♠ 85  
 ♥ KQ5  
 ♦ K76  
 ♣ KT543



East  
 ♠ QT3  
 ♥ A2  
 ♦ A93  
 ♣ AJ862

South  
 ♠ AJ764  
 ♥ J9763  
 ♦ J5  
 ♣ 7

This set of six deals is concerned with defensive co-operation against 3NT. There is another set in this edition of V-Blue with a similar theme. Much of this defensive play is concerned with counting. You must be able to count your own suit if you are the opening leader and partner should be there in third seat, ready and willing to help. There are clear conventions in leading back partner's suit when you are the third player.

***With two cards remaining lead the higher; with three cards remaining lead the lowest.***

**This allows (an intelligent) partner to know how his suit is lying and what declarer has left. This may be very important on some deals – we'll see how this works as we go along.**

Hand 1: We'll start with a trivial deal, just to get you in the mood...

West	North	East	South
-	P	1NT	P
3NT	P	P	P

Lead: ♠ 6

You have to lead to 3NT after East and West have a simple bidding sequence. With two five-card suits you choose the stronger one and select the (obvious) fourth-highest card, to wit: the ♠6.

You partner obligingly produces the ♠K and returns the ♠9. Now, this shows that his original holding was either ♠K 9 or ♠K 9 ×, it is inconsistent play from ♠K 9 × ×.

The rule that defenders should follow here is that they should play back the **higher card from two remaining** and the **lowest of three remaining**.

*[For completeness, and as an alternative way of looking at it, if you started with five cards in partner's suit – which happens with the frequency of the appearance of Halley's comet – you return your original fourth-highest.*

*In the examples below imagine partner led a Spade against something or other:*

*With ♠A 9 7 2 you would win the ♠A and return the ♠2 (which is your original fourth-highest Spade as well as being the lowest of three remaining cards)*

*With ♠A 9 7 3 2 you would win the ♠A and return the ♠3 (which is your original fourth-highest Spade).*

*With ♠A 9 2 you would win the ♠A and return the ♠9.]*

Anyway, that makes little difference to this particular deal. Declarer produces the ♠10 so you win the ♠J and try the ♠A. If North were to show out then that would leave East with the boss ♠Q but that can't be helped. As the cards lie, partner follows to the ♠A, declarer's last Spade falls and the last two Spades are set up to be cashed. The defenders take the first five tricks and declarer mops up the rest for one off.

Notice, in passing, that North played his ♠K ("third player plays high"); failure to do so would represent a dereliction of duty. Note also the need for you, as a defender, to count carefully the cards in "your" suit (Spades in this case) so that you know when they have been established.


Not all deals will be this straightforward. You have been warned!



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VB#24 Year 1 Third hand defense in NT (giving count) Part 1 SA	Contract: 3N By: West
Date: 29/10/2014	Board #: 2
Dealer: East	Vulnerable: N / S
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	

	North	
	♠ 653	
	♥ AT643	
	♦ 8653	
	♣ Q	
West		East
♠ AK7		♠ 42
♥ Q9		♥ 872
♦ K72		♦ AQJ94
♣ KJT94		♣ A73
	South	
	♠ QJT98	
	♥ KJ5	
	♦ T	
	♣ 8652	

This is another simple deal, included here to emphasize the rationale for our defensive practices.

One of the most mortifying way defenders can muck up a deal is to **block** a suit.

Can you avoid that fate here?

West	North	East	South
-	-	P	P
1NT	P	3NT	P
P	P		

Lead: ♥ 4

West and East bid 1NT – 3NT and partner fishes out a small Heart as his opening lead. You just need to defend in textbook fashion here to defeat what may look to be an easy contract. (At least, East expects it to be an easy contract as he displays 11 points in the dummy including a powerful Diamond suit).

Firstly, you have to play the ♥K at trick one and not in any way be tempted by the ♥J. That would be terrible defense (a bridge crime referred to as “finessing against partner” and punishable by being made to do the washing-up for a month).

Having survived step one by (correctly) playing the ♥K and not allowing West to make a cheap trick with the ♥Q you have to ensure that you play back the correct Heart at trick two.

*[Of course, you should not be tempted by that mighty Spade suit – if partner has the ♥A he can't have the ♠A as well (count the points – where are West's 15-17?) and a Spade switch would hold no terrors for declarer if he did hold the ♠A. No, you must **return your partner's suit and that means playing back a Heart.**]*

With only two Hearts it is best to return the higher – here that's the ♥J. It doesn't matter, you say? Ah, but it's crucial!

Let's assume that you return the ♥5 instead. West would play the ♥Q, perforce, and North would take the ♥A. A third round of Hearts would be won by your ♥J and there will be long and distinctly chilly silence broken by the icy tones of your partner. “It's your lead, partner”, would come wafting across the table through gritted teeth. Oops! – partner would have two winning Hearts and you would be on lead. Not good... not good at all.

You can avoid such embarrassments by leading back the ♥J. Declarer takes the ♥Q with his ♥A, cashes the ♥10 and has two more Hearts to cash while you chuck some rubbish from your hand.

After this deal you can share the washing-up duties for a while. Alternatively, you can celebrate your defensive collaboration by buying a dishwasher...






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VB#24 Year 1 Third hand defense in NT (giving count) Part 1 SA	Contract: 3N By: West
Date: 29/10/2014	Board #: 3
Dealer: South	Vulnerable: E / W
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	

	North	
	♠ QT2	
	♥ K942	
	♦ 742	
	♣ 963	
West		East
♠ AKJ4		♠ 653
♥ J763		♥ A8
♦ KT5		♦ QJ983
♣ K8		♣ QJ7
	South	
	♠ 987	
	♥ QT5	
	♦ A6	
	♣ AT542	

Some hands need defensive co-operation within an actual suit.

There's a sub-plot here as well – let's see how you do.

West	North	East	South
-	-	-	P
1NT	P	3NT	P
P	P		

Lead: ♥ 2

Your partner leads the ♥2 against 3NT reached by West and you need to defend with accuracy. While declarer is thinking about his play you should also be doing some thinking (**Count** and **Plan** is a defensive tactic as well as a general strategy for declarer).

So – the numbers game. Firstly, partner has led the ♥2 so has four Hearts – that gives West four Hearts as well (you have five between you and dummy; do the math).

Secondly, you have 10 points and dummy has 10. That comes to 20. Declarer has announced 15-17 so that leaves North with a miserable 3-5 points. So you can forget partner holding something magical such as the ♠A Q 10. He doesn't – end of argument.

Dummy ducks the Heart at trick one and you may as well return the suit after taking your ♥Q. Best play is the ♥10, both as a *count signal* and as a possible *unblocking* maneuver. Declarer wins and, naturally, sets up his long suit by playing on Diamonds. You win the second round and play a third Heart.

Now you can see the value of unshipping that ♥10. Partner is left with ♥K 9 over West's ♥J 7 and that gives the defense two further Heart tricks. If you had retained the ♥10 it would not have been possible to pick up two more tricks here.

Anyway, partner cashes his two Hearts and you have to find a discard. The ♣2 would be disastrous – partner needs to know what to switch to and that would say "I don't like Clubs – try something else". Note that a Spade switch from North gives West four Spade tricks – and the contract (four Spades, four Diamonds and the ♥A).

The way to prevent this fiasco is to discard the ♣10 – "Partner, here I am, come and get me!" This requests ("demands" would be a better word) a Club lead from North and that's the fifth defensive trick.



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VB#24 Year 1 Third hand defense in NT (giving count) Part 1 SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 29/10/2014	By: West
Dealer: West	Board #: 4
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: All

	North	
	♠ 8542	
	♥ 52	
	♦ 65	
	♣ QJ987	
West		East
♠ A7		♠ J3
♥ AKJ9		♥ Q74
♦ QJ82		♦ AT974
♣ T52		♣ A64
	South	
	♠ KQT96	
	♥ T863	
	♦ K3	
	♣ K3	

One of your key tasks as a defender is to **Read the Lead**.

As declarer contemplates dummy and works out his line of play you must be performing your own calculations. You have to **Count** – **Plan** – **Execute** as a defender.

It always irritates us to see defenders stare out of the window as declarer is cogitating at trick one. This time period is a heaven-sent opportunity to perform some crucial calculations of your own.

How do you intend to defeat a game on this deal?

<b>West</b>	<b>North</b>	<b>East</b>	<b>South</b>
1NT	P	3NT	P
P	P		

Lead: ♣ Q

The opponents reach 3NT before you get a chance to mention your Spades. This is a pity as you can see the instant dummy goes down that a Spade lead from partner would have been a killer. Ho-hum.

Anyway, partner's actual selection is the ♣Q so you will have to make the best you can from that. A count of points shows North can have no more than 3 – he can't have a stitch outside his Clubs.

Declarer takes the ♣A (he can't afford to hold up – a Spade shift would be a killer) and you... must drop the ♣K underneath it. After you have seen this a few times this type of play becomes routine but until you have it seems an unnatural practice.

North is promising the ♣Q J with his opening lead – probably the ♣Q J 10, maybe the ♣Q J 9. If you were to hold onto your King you would **block** the suit and partner's long Clubs would wither on the vine.

West has no choice but to try the Diamond finesse – on taking your ♦K you hasten to return a Club, hoping North has enough Clubs to defeat the contract.

Luck is on your side. North has five Clubs and this translates into four defensive tricks. One off.



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VB#24 Year 1 Third hand defense in NT (giving count) Part 1 SA	Contract: 3N By: West
Date: 29/10/2014	Board #: 5
Dealer: North	Vulnerable: N / S
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	

West	North	East	South
-	P	P	P
1NT	P	3NT	P
P	P		

Lead: ♠ 3

The Spade layout on this deal comes up with surprising frequency and you must be prepared to take advantage of the deceptive possibilities.

As ever, East-West arrive rapidly in 3NT against which North leads a low Spade. How should you plan the defense as South?

Firstly, you should note that partner has led the lowest visible Spade (the ♠3; you have the ♠2) so North (assuming that he has led fourth-highest) cannot have a five-card suit. There is, therefore, no chance of the defenders rattling off the first five Spade tricks.

You should win the ♠K (and on some days might try the ♠A, breaking the normal "rules") and should lead back the ♠2. Why? Well if North has four Spades headed by the ♠Q or the ♠10 it simply doesn't matter what you do. Declarer, who must have three Spades, remember, either has no trick in Spades or a certain trick in Spades regardless of how you play.

But what of the distribution here? Declarer has a ghastly choice of what to do at trick two; either the ♠Q or the ♠10 could be the right card to play, depending on who has what. If you give the opponents the chance to go wrong then they often will – well half the time, anyway. Put another way, if you never give the opponents the chance to go wrong they can only get it right...

So you give declarer an unpleasant choice at trick two and declarer decides (on the spin of a coin) that your partner has ♠A × × × and that you have ♠K J × ×. That's just as probable as the actual distribution so we should not criticize.

Note that winning the ♠A and playing back a low Spade may be even more persuasive for declarer. Thinking that you would be bound to play the ♠K from the ♠A K he is much more likely to play you for ♠A J × × and to finesse the ♠10. You shouldn't overdo it, though. Play the ♠K sometimes, the ♠A other times. However, the key point is **not** to cash the ♠A K.

After we take the first four Spade tricks and North gets off lead with the ♦Q the whole hand

North  
♠ J943  
♥ 6532  
♦ QJ8  
♣ 53

West  
♠ QT8  
♥ AKQ  
♦ AT3  
♣ JT92



East  
♠ 75  
♥ J4  
♦ K742  
♣ AQ764

South  
♠ AK62  
♥ T987  
♦ 965  
♣ K8

Here, on this deal, declarer can always make 3NT.

However, "can" and "should" are not synonyms – would you have found the winning line of play as declarer?

First, though, can you impale declarer on the horns of a dilemma?

depends on the Club finesse. It just isn't West's  
lucky day today...





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VB#24 Year 1 Third hand defense in NT (giving count) Part 1	Contract: 3N
SA	By: East
Date: 29/10/2014	Board #: 6
Dealer: East	Vulnerable: E / W
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	

North  
 ♠ AK742  
 ♥ T9532  
 ♦ Q2  
 ♣ 5

West  
 ♠ J5  
 ♥ J64  
 ♦ A94  
 ♣ AKT76



East  
 ♠ Q9  
 ♥ AKQ8  
 ♦ KT63  
 ♣ Q84

South  
 ♠ T863  
 ♥ 7  
 ♦ J875  
 ♣ J932

On this deal you have a miserable collection of old tat.

First you have to find an inspired lead and, having cleared that hurdle, read the hand with sufficient accuracy to follow up your brilliance.

Are you up for the challenge?

West	North	East	South
-	-	1NT	P
3NT	P	P	P

Lead: ♠ 3

The opponents reach 3NT again and you have a miserable selection to lead from. Three rotten suits – what do you choose?

Well, you might opt for the time-honored *fourth-highest-of-your-longest-and-strongest* (a low Club in this case) but you might prefer to lead a major. Why? Well, although the logic isn't exactly infallible, it is usually better to prefer to lead a major than a minor.

Why? Well, players usually prefer to bid majors if they have them but tend to ignore minors, treating them with some contempt. So it would be unsurprising to see a five-card (even a six-card) minor hit the table when dummy is exposed but a five-card major would raise an eyebrow or two.

On that flimsy basis a Spade lead is to be preferred to a Club or Diamond lead. Anything could be right, of course, but there are (successful) players who live by the precept of "When in doubt, lead a Spade".

Anyway, a Spade lead it is and you decide to lead the ♠3. Should you lead the ♠8 (second-highest from four poor cards)? Well, some players would, and some players wouldn't. You need to agree this one with your partner. Is a Ten an honor card or not?

Having led the ♠3 the defense then has to get things exactly right. North takes the ♠K and cashes the ♠A. Note that, holding five Spades, partner has no thought of playing back a low one at trick two (see Hand 5 for comparison).

When you see the ♠Q fall and the ♠J on the table about to drop you should realize that East-West have but two Spades each. Elated that you have found the right lead you might sleepily play low – and that would undo all your good work. The Spades would be **blocked** and North's fifth Spade would never make.

You must unblock the ♠8 (the ♠10 would do just as well) and then continue the process. On the next Spade you must take the ♠10 and finally play back the ♠6. North overtakes with the ♠7 and cashes the last Spade.

Exhausted but happy you record one off.

A string of six successive failures for East-West. Hard luck, guys...